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Soldados Nunca Mais: Child Soldiers, Football and Social Change in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas

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Introduction

This chapter evaluates the work of The Brazilian Institute for Innovations in Social Health (IBISS), specifically its use of sport as a vehicle for health promotion and building urban peace among youth in Rio de Janeiro. It focuses especially upon IBISS's *Soldados Nunca Mais* programme, which uses football games with a twofold aim: to break down social prejudices and to encourage child soldiers¹ to leave the drug trade. During the ten years since *Soldados Nunca Mais* was established, it has successfully supported 3,432 children to leave the drug trade, using a range of strategies among which are initiatives involving soccer. This chapter outlines the programme's successes and limitations in relation to sport, including specific strategies it has used. It also provides a general reflection upon the role of sport for social development based on these experiences. It will be shown that in IBISS's experience, football games alone do not have the power to build peace or momentous positive transformations to the lives of young people. The potential of football relies rather on the efforts of committed development workers and their ability to identify and innovate around the informal social spaces that football opens.

Methodologically, this chapter is underpinned by qualitative testimony on the part of Nanko G. van Buuren, director of IBISS, and Elizabeth Kath, a research fellow with RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. This included a number of in depth face-to-face interviews conducted in Rio de Janeiro during periods Kath spent visiting IBISS along with subsequent follow-up conversations via e-mail correspondence. It sets out to trace the story of IBISS from the perspective of a sport-for-development

practitioner with the assistance of an academic versed in Latin American Studies. This is an example of what Stake (1995) has labelled an intrinsic case study; the characteristics of an agent's context drive the research instead of the agent seeking out a context in which to investigate certain characteristics. The case is, in short, uniquely and intrinsically valuable; there is no effort nor indeed need to generalise from it (Flyvberg, 2006). A limitation of this chapter is, therefore, the reliance on expert testimony from van Buuren, although the IBISS website provides supplementary evidence in the form of documents, newsletters, photos and videos.² That said, some scholars put considerable weight, particularly in exploratory research, on 'the authority of the experienter' to inform the research agent (Smith, 2005: 138). Indeed, as Campbell (1998) has put it, experience itself is a form of data that researchers can gather via interviews and endeavour to make sense of. A combination of experience and expertise is, therefore, fertile ground for qualitative interviewing (Bogner et al., 2009). This chapter is, nonetheless, a first step in terms of investigating the operation of IBISS in the favelas of Rio. Further research will be needed to investigate the many and varied experiences of those involved with the programme and challenges that the programme still faces.

The context of Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro is a paradoxical and deeply divided city. Lining its spectacular Atlantic coastlines are miles of South America's most expensive real estate; new, modern apartments that house the city's economic elite and provide luxury accommodation for tourists who flock to the city for its vibrancy, natural beauty and carnival celebrations. Clearly visible from these affluent surroundings are hillsides of impoverished shantytowns or favelas, many more of which extend across the city's North Zone (around five hundred *favelas* in total), which are home to around 40 per cent of the city's six million people (IBGE, 2012). The close geographic proximity of these contrasting worlds gives a deceiving impression that they share the same city – yet arguably more than one Rio de Janeiro exists. As one journalist has put it, 'The favelas, Rio's guilty conscience ... overlook paradise but never partake ... The two Rio's are on a collision course' (Thompson, 2010). It is not unusual for citizens of Rio de Janeiro (*Cariocas*) who grew up in its wealthy zones to have never set foot in a favela in their lifetime. Favelas lack basic infrastructure and services including access to (quality) health care, education and other public services³; they are stigmatised by intense stereotypes and prejudices, which, beyond their deep psychological impact, also have very tangible

consequences, limiting opportunities for further education, vocational training, jobs and access to credit or bank loans.⁴ This results from both the active stigmatisation and exclusion from opportunities, and sometimes favelados (a discriminating term for favela residents) internalise this stigmatisation wherein it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (*I can't get a job; why would anybody employ me if I live here?*) (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012-2013).

While favelas have often been depicted as marginalised communities, segregated from mainstream society, this is not entirely accurate. As Janice Perlman observes in her landmark work on marginality in Rio de Janeiro, favela residents are in fact tightly integrated into mainstream society in terms of their contributions to it, but in return are excluded from its benefits:

Favelados or urban squatters are not *marginal* but *integrated* into the society, albeit in a manner detrimental to their own interests. They are not separate from or on the margin of the system, but are tightly bound into it in a severely radically asymmetrical form. They contribute their hard work, their high hopes, and their loyalties, but they do not benefit from the goods and the services of the system ... favela dwellers are *not economically and politically marginal but exploited and repressed, not socially and culturally marginal but stigmatized and excluded from a closed social system.* (Perlman, 1975: 131)

The state's formal role in the provision of governance and services in favela communities has historically been negligible, and so informal governance systems have filled its space. Three major illicit drug cartels control many of the city's favelas, administering their own internal system of law and governance, a situation that has been described in such terms as the 'state inside the state' or the 'shadow city' (Neuwirth, 2006; Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012-2013). Those who live in the cartel-controlled zones identify personally with the informal system, even if they themselves are not directly involved with the drug trade, referring to themselves in such terms as *I am red command*, or *I am third command*. Rivalry between cartels and the cycle of attempts by the formal state to assert its control has ravaged favela communities with violence and fear.

In recent years, within the framework of preparing a 'safe and unarmed Rio' for the FIFA World Football Championship 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016, the Government has elaborated a new policy to 'pacify' favelas near to the stadiums, tourist areas and highways (Barrionuevo,

2010; Zibechi, 2010). Pacification means that Police (sometimes with the help of the Army) occupy a favela 24 hours per day. The initial occupation of a favela has usually provoked a situation of extreme violence, with many victims, not only among drug soldiers and police but also among innocent favela residents who can be caught in the crossfire or hit by stray bullets (Alves and Evanson, 2011).

After the initial occupation of a favela, the Government installs UPP units (*Unidade de Policia Pacificadora*/ Pacifying Police Units) to carry out community policing in an attempt to fill the vacuum of authority and rule left after traffickers are driven out of the favelas. The responsibility of these units is to ensure that the favela remains clean of weapons and organised crime. By late 2012, around 30 favelas had been pacified under this process (Secretaria de Estado de Segurança, 2012). One of the results of this state-sanctioned process is that drug lords and drug soldiers from occupied favelas shifted territory and settled in other favela areas belonging to the same cartel. As a result, some of these favelas have become overloaded with drug lords and soldiers and turned into criminal fortresses with intensified concentrations of organised crime (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013). This is the Rio de Janeiro in which IBISS works.

IBISS's work in Rio de Janeiro

The IBISS was established in 1989. It was created soon after van Buuren first travelled from his home country of the Netherlands to Rio de Janeiro on a mission for European funding agencies, which focused on an impact assessment of foreign aid for work with street children. His key findings were that street workers were well intentioned and had established good relationships with the street children, but had few ideas about how to support these young people and improve their social situation. Street workers regularly visited children on the streets and offered them food and blankets, but ultimately the children stayed on the streets. One of van Buuren's recommendations to the funding agencies was to set up a training centre for street workers where they could learn how to support and strengthen the children in their struggle to leave the streets and integrate into wider society. Upon his return to the Netherlands, van Buuren's employers asked him to live in Brazil for two years to establish such a training centre. In his first 18 months in Rio, van Buuren met many inspiring young street workers with interesting and innovative ideas. Yet, whenever he asked them why they did not implement these ideas, the usual response was

that they were constrained by either the political or religious agendas of their Government- or Church-linked organisations. From here IBISS was born. Along with a group of 12 young street workers, van Buuren founded the organisation as a way to provide them the space and opportunities with which to experiment and produce innovative ideas. Van Buuren himself fell in love with Brazil and the people he met, and thus relocated from the Netherlands, along with his wife, to dedicate himself to the new organisation. In the early years, the group's focus was mainly on health, including AIDS/ STD prevention on the streets among street children and sex workers, as well as early detection of illnesses by community health workers.

Today, IBISS is a well-established organisation working in dozens of favela communities around Rio de Janeiro. It employs more than 300 people, over 80 per cent of whom grew up and still live in the favelas in which the organisation works. In addition to these paid employees, around ten international volunteers are employed each year. IBISS's core goal is to help address socio-economic inequality and violence and to support and empower disadvantaged groups to advocate for their human rights. In doing so, it is committed to ongoing innovation and an approach that draws principles from a number conceptual frameworks, including community engagement, reconciliation and social inclusion, in addition to reflection upon its own experiences over time. Its work focuses on communities that are socially excluded and rife with violence and health crises. It also works with specific target groups including people who are homeless, *catadores* (those who survive by collecting and reselling recyclable waste) and child soldiers – young people who are recruited to work in the drug trade. IBISS runs its programmes independently of church and government. In some cases, it receives project-based funding from government, but is autonomous in the design and implementation of projects. In these cases, the funding received comes from the Federal Government through the Ministry of Justice (Human Rights Department) and the Ministry of Health (Health Fund). In order to maintain its *Utilidade Pública Federal* status,⁵ IBISS is required to report its results and impacts to these Ministries. It is also subject to a detailed audit each year.

***Soldados Nunca Mais* (soldiers never more)**

Approximately eight-and-a-half thousand young people – some as young as eight years old – are working as child soldiers in Rio de Janeiro's drug wars (IBISS, 2012). Most children who enter the drug trade do so either



Figure 11.1 Child soldier

Notes: The two boys pictured spent part of their lives working as child soldiers in Rio de Janeiro. Both lost their lives. This article is dedicated to these boys, and every young person who has lost life in this way; and to the hope for a future where this will never again happen. Photo: Nanko G. van Buuren.

as a result of desperate poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion. Amid these very vulnerable circumstances, children can turn to the drug trade for money, or in an attempt to gain social status, identity and kinship where they otherwise have none. The outcomes of this violent and dangerous form of child labour are usually devastating; IBISS's mapping estimates that more than 80 per cent of child soldiers do not live past their twenty-first birthday (for further statistics, see also Dowdney, 2003; Jacobo Waiselsz, 2012).

The war in Rio de Janeiro

In 2010, the images of the 'War in Rio de Janeiro' shocked the world. The Police and the Army were mobilised for an intense battle against the drug mafia in Rio de Janeiro's favelas as part of the new pacification process. Dozens of 'soldados' (child soldiers recruited by the drug mafia) died, and many innocent slum inhabitants were hit by stray bullets. As a result of this violent war, over 300 'soldados' contacted IBISS saying

that they wanted to leave the drug trade. Although Brazil is not typically considered a country at war, IBISS's experience has been of another reality. Many inhabitants of favelas in Rio de Janeiro live, or better said, have to survive, in a constant state of war with many casualties. Large numbers of children and adolescents involved in the drug trade and organised crime are killed in confrontation with police or rival gangs.

The phenomenon 'soldado'

Many children and adolescents are working as 'soldados' (soldiers) in the drug business. These soldados are recruited by the *Firma* (the mafia). Heavily armed with weapons such as AK-47s and AR-15s, they have to defend the 'bocas de fumo' (laboratories and selling points) against police raids and attacks from rival gangs.

From 2010, IBISS began mapping an inventory of child labour exploitation by the drug mafia. The number of soldados defending the 'bocas de fumo' was counted and the result was alarming:

• Inventoried slums	232
• Number of drug selling points	348
• Number of children and young people involved in drug trafficking, from 8 to 18 years	14,517
• Number of involved boys	11,961
• Number of involved girls	2,556
• Number of 'soldiers'	8,442
• Number of soldiers younger than 12 years	386
• Number of unarmed persons	6,075
• Number of unarmed persons younger than 12 years	919

The figures highlight that almost 8,500 children are soldiers in the drug wars in Rio de Janeiro and that more than 14,500 children and adolescents are involved in the drug trade (not only as soldiers but also as unarmed watchers, transporters, etc.).

The work of *Soldados Nunca Mais*

The main goal of IBISS's *Soldados Nunca Mais* programme is to improve the lives of child soldiers, and especially to encourage and support them to leave the drug trade. IBISS uses a wide range of initiatives towards this goal, including the following:

- street corner work with attractive activities (including football games) to reach out to soldados,

- awareness talks,
- negotiating with drug lords,
- negotiating 'conditional discharge' with the Public Prosecutor,
- trauma therapies and coping strategies,
- counselling on returning to school,
- vocational training,
- reference to the labour market,
- developing alternative jobs.

In 2010, as a result of this programme, 342 soldados left the drugs business. Since the start of the programme in 2005, over 3,400 soldados were convinced and enabled by a team of eight ex-soldados and seven ex-drug bosses to choose a new life. In the cases of very young boys and girls, this includes referral back to school (IBISS has a process for registering whether children participating in its football games are attending school). Older adolescents are referred to vocational training and the labour market. IBISS has a specific development project linked to the soldados programme, which focuses on this re-integration process. As part of this programme, a number of soldados are given work opportunities as trainees with IBISS. The rate of supporting young people to leave the drug trade and socially reintegrate not only has exceeded IBISS's initial expectations, but also presents a mixed blessing as IBISS is now faced with the task of ensuring their workers do not fall back into the trade. On the whole, the organisation's experience is that ex-soldados who are given a second chance at life go on to be highly committed and successful in both staying out of the drug trade and in their lives generally. While the programme uses all of the strategies outlined earlier, this chapter focuses on IBISS's use of sport, namely, football games, in its work with child soldiers.

The use of football games

Football is frequently described as a national obsession in Brazil; the often repeated narrative of the child born in a favela who dreams of becoming a football star is so well known that it has become entrenched in global stereotypes of the country.⁶ The intense popular enthusiasm for the game extends across the deep socio-economic chasm of Brazilian society, and thus the football pitch may be one of the few spaces in which possibilities exist for Brazilians from different worlds to meet on equal footing. IBISS began to work with football as part of its child soldier programme for multiple reasons, not least because most young people, especially boys, love and will almost always show up for a game. Football matches, for this

reason, presented a source and a vehicle for social development work (see Schulenkorf, 2010a). In other words, it was a blessing in the early days for IBISS health workers faced with the challenge of trying to make contact with young soldiers who were not in school and otherwise difficult to locate. The games became central to the organisation's health promotion work: it was here where large groups of children and teenagers gathered and where it was therefore possible to distribute basic health education messages, including talks on STD transmission and how to detect the early signs of serious health issues, such as leprosy and tuberculosis.

Over time, IBISS found new ways of working with and around the football games. Participation in football required a boy to first put down his gun – no weapons were allowed on the field. A precondition for playing on the team was regular school attendance. A practice was developed around 'after game evaluation circles'. Modelled on a strategy used by the national football team, evaluation circles are essentially a discussion involving the players and coach after a game to reflect upon how the team's performance on the field could be improved. IBISS appropriated the idea as a way to open a space for discussion among the young players, beginning with a reflection upon sporting performance on the field but often opening into a space for talking about and reflecting upon life off the field. The following tract provides a 'thick description' of how these conversations can unfold; using a case study approach, it relays the lived experience of one child soldier who participated in IBISS's football programme.

Juliano

Juliano⁷ lived through a great deal of pain as a child, especially because his mother suffered from drug addiction. One day Juliano's mother was given a package of drugs to sell. When she used the drugs herself rather than selling them, the drug boss shot her dead. Juliano was only 14 years old. Soon after losing his mother, Juliano took up a gun and joined the drug trade, a decision which was a mystery to all who witnessed it. On occasion, Juliano, with his rifle over his shoulder, would walk past the football games IBISS was holding in the favela. The coach always encouraged him to put down his gun and come and play, but he would always shake his head and keep walking. It so happened one day that police stormed into the favela on one of their raids, and an intense shootout ensued between police and the traffickers. Amid the turmoil, the drug boss was arrested, taken away and imprisoned. The day after this shootout, Juliano put down his gun and quit the drug trade. He gave no explanation to anybody.

Onlookers found this sudden decision of Juliano's as baffling as his initial decision to take up arms.

From this point, Juliano began to participate in the IBISS football games. Typically, after each game, the previously described evaluation circle was held, a discussion in which the boys talked about any issues related to the preceding game, and what improvements can be made. The coach often guides these conversations to include discussions of the challenges the boys might be facing in life. On this particular occasion, a boy had behaved violently towards a fellow player during a game, and the discussion after the game led to the question of what strategies the boys could adopt to deal with frustration and trauma. It was then that the usually silent Juliano spoke up.

'I'll tell you a strategy I used for dealing with trauma. You know my mother died, right?'

Others in the group nodded

'When the drug boss shot my mother, I came up with a plan. I took up a gun and started working for him. My plan was that one day when there was a confrontation with police, I would stand behind the drug boss and pretend to be shooting the police, but I would shoot him in the back instead.'

Some days after this discussion took place, Juliano told IBISS staff members that some of his pain had lifted, and that his intense feelings of revenge had gone. Maybe it was the simple fact of being able to talk about what had been in his head that provided some relief (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013). Juliano's traumatic experiences are, it must be said, unlikely to be completely 'resolved' by participation in a football and social development programme. However, IBISS at least provided an environment in which he felt welcome and where he could share his story.

Asphalt and Favela Bridge-building: sport as a vehicle for social change

More recently, the IBISS football games have become the sites of bold initiatives intended to begin chipping away at some of Rio's deeply entrenched social barriers. Perhaps surprisingly, IBISS stages football games in favelas with the participation of visiting teams from wealthy zones of Rio (often referred to as the 'asphalt/*asfalto*'⁸ by favela residents). For many of the visiting players, this provides a first time experience of entering a favela, despite living only a few hundred metres or a few kilometres away. It also provides a unique space in which young people from favelas and the 'asphalt' might meet as fellow players, and on more equal terms than might ever be possible elsewhere. For the

players visiting the favela for the first time, one of the common experiences is of surprise at how well-organised favela communities can be, as opposed to common stereotypes of favelas as places of mayhem and chaos. After these football matches, some of the participants from the ‘asphalt’ stay in contact with the young people they met in the favelas. In the experience of IBISS, these young people appear to let go of some of the stereotypes of one another – having come face to face with the ‘other’, the asphalt participants are less likely to view the favela boys as dangerous criminals, while the favela residents often change their perceptions of young people from the asphalt as being arrogant playboys. IBISS has observed other outcomes of these games: some participants from favelas have been invited to play in asphalt communities, and several of the favela youth were even encouraged to attend schools in the asphalt areas. In the latter case, IBISS has noticed, the asphalt participants defended the access of the favela youth to the schools and helped to prevent them from being stigmatised by other students (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

Organising games between favela and asphalt teams is not a simple process. From the outset, IBISS staff were challenged with intense



Figure 11.2 Favela painting

prejudice and social stigma towards favela players. The directors of football fields in asphalt areas are often the first to object to the initiative. Many do not like the idea of favela kids using their accommodation due to negative preconceptions that favela kids are inherently violent or will steal. Directors also worry about facing criticism from asphalt children's parents. Parents, too, can be afraid of the reputations of favelas as violent, dangerous places and will often forbid their children from going there to play a game. For IBISS, overcoming this kind of resistance has been a delicate process. The most effective approach has been aimed at integrating football directors and parents into the projects. IBISS begins by inviting wary football field directors, trainers and parents from asphalt areas to assist with the organisation of a game at a club where favela players visit and play on an asphalt football field (a club that already has a good working relationship with IBISS). By witnessing another asphalt community embracing the idea, and experiencing the exchange first hand, many of the directors, trainers and parents warm up to the idea of an intergroup exchange (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

To an outside observer, it may not be immediately obvious either why a young person living in a privileged asphalt community would want to play football in a favela. Usually the interest emerges from intrigue, curiosity or challenge. Samba and football are the two arenas where favela residents are revered and often seen to be superior to those living on the asphalt. Similarities can be drawn between those from the asphalt who visit and join samba schools in favelas and those who visit favelas to play football; just as many of the greatest *sambistas* come from favelas, so too do many great football stars of Brazil. While, on the one hand, asphalt teams can be fearful of playing against favela teams, they are also aware of the high quality of players in favelas and are drawn to the challenge. IBISS has observed that the games between favela and asphalt teams also appear to have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the players from favelas, and on mitigating the self-discriminating attitudes that are commonplace. For instance, after playing competitively against asphalt teams and often winning, some 'favelados' express hopes or perceive possibilities that they might also be able to compete in other areas of life. Of course, life beyond the football pitch is far more complex and challenging than within a field of play in which equal opportunities are, in many ways, out of step with everything else in the lives of 'favelados'. Nevertheless, the external discrimination people who live in favelas suffer can often reproduce itself in people's perceptions of themselves

and of their life possibilities, thereby reinforcing social exclusion. In this sense, the new ways of thinking the games can encourage are potentially powerful and transformative (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

Intra-favela cartels

Some of the greatest challenges for youth are, of course, within the favelas themselves. In recognition of that complexity, IBISS has organised an ongoing series of intra-favela football matches with the goal of taking steps towards building urban peace among players by helping to address deep prejudices and hostilities between favela zones controlled by warring drug cartels. Such is the extent of segregation between favela communities controlled by enemy cartels that little movement or association between these populations is normally tolerated. Young people living in these opposing zones would never, under everyday circumstances, have the opportunity to play football together, or spend time together in any recreational or non-confrontational setting. The following interview excerpt from Dowdney's (2003: 157) case study, *Children of the Drug Trade*, provides a sense of the alienation that can develop between young soldiers from warring cartel zones. Describing the 'kill-or-be-killed' environment in which child soldiers survive, Dowdney found that some child soldiers were conditioned to believe killing to be justified where the victim was 'the enemy'. This is what 12-year-old Fogueteiro had to say:

T: We have to kill the police and the Terceiro Comando (Third Command) so that [people from the] Terceiro Comando die.

I: Do you think it's wrong to kill people?

T: Not if they're Terceiro Comando. Then we have to kill them.⁹

In 2011, IBISS organised a game between teams of boys from a Third Command area and a Red Command area. The game, held on neutral territory, was the first of its kind and a series of similar games have since followed. To date, the games have been accompanied by a carefully designed and facilitated process. First, the facilitator/coach holds a group discussion with each team separately. During this discussion, the players (mostly around the age of 14) are asked questions, such as *What are five reasons why you are afraid to play the other team?* and *What are five reasons why the other team should be afraid to play against you? How do you think the other team 'sees' you?* These questions typically give rise to an outpouring of stereotypes and prejudices regarding the opposing

team. The two teams later come together at the marked time to play each other, and through that process meet one another. As part of the game, various strategies are used to allow the boys to reflect upon their own identity and that of 'the other'. For example, those living in the 'Third Command' zone are usually forbidden from wearing red shirts in their favela. When IBISS holds its matches, it often allocates red t-shirts to the boys from the Third Command zones; in other words, they wear the clothes of 'the other' during the game, allowing a confrontation of some of the boys' most fundamental prejudices. During the breaks, the coaches encourage teams to engage and converse with one another. This can include raising the same questions that were asked in the pre-game conversations, or asking specific questions for discussion, such as why one group has a prejudice against the colour red. While sometimes reluctant at first to openly discuss their prejudices in front of the other team, the boys eventually begin to talk – usually each group has great curiosity regarding the opposing team, including wanting to find out what the other group's answers had been to the pre-game discussions (*Had they been correct in their preconceptions about the other group? And what did the other group say about them?*). Despite this curiosity, they are often initially reticent and sometimes ashamed about openly admitting their prejudices to the opposing players. After the game, a barbeque is usually held where the two teams spend some hours together and are given further opportunity to talk among themselves in a less formal environment. It is usually then that players are more likely to drop some of their prior reservations. Typically during the barbeque, players start joking, with many seeing absurdity in their previously held prejudices. Often, they set times to play each other on neutral territory again in the future (the games are facilitated by IBISS coaches) (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

Although these games were first held on neutral territory, more recently IBISS has ventured further and started to hold games on the home field inside cartel zones. These games are a bold move because they often produce feelings of trepidation, excitement and nervousness among the players and their facilitators. Anecdotally, the observations of these games seem highly positive, with participants finishing the exercise with fewer negative ideas about the other and many expressing a sense that 'we were crazy'¹⁰ for holding so many extreme prejudices and stereotypes about the other group (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

As with games between favela and asphalt communities, these intra-favela, inter-cartel games are challenging to organise. The young players

themselves from the different cartel teams – despite often harbouring intense fear of and hatred against one another – are nevertheless usually eager to participate in the games; the opportunity to win against another cartel is appealing. The teams also have some limited previous experience of playing against one another as part of the ‘favela championships’ held on neutral territory; the young players love football so much that they will usually do anything to make the games possible. On the other hand, greater effort is usually required to convince drug bosses to permit the game, especially if the game is to be held on cartel grounds. IBISS has so far negotiated by making assurances that the visiting players will not be permitted to walk through the favela and thus observe the surroundings, but instead will walk directly from the favela boundary to the football field, and return directly the same way after the post-game barbeque finishes.¹¹ As with all of IBISS’s activities in favelas, communities (including drug lords, soldiers and presidents of resident associations) are consulted repeatedly throughout the planning process. This is vitally important to the success of projects, not least because it avoids last minute opposition and interruption (van Buuren/Kath interview 2012, 2013).

So far the discussion in this chapter has focused on male football teams; it is not immediately obvious to an outside observer how girls fit into IBISS’s sport programmes. Football is a male-dominated sport and teams do not typically mix male and female players, which raises some challenges in terms of ensuring that girls are incorporated. This is no trivial consideration, particularly given that a significant proportion of Rio’s child soldiers are female. IBISS’s figures indicate that 17.6 per cent of children and adolescents involved in the drug mafia are girls, and of those who left the drug trade as part of IBISS’s programmes, almost 20 per cent are girls. IBISS does have female football and volleyball teams, and girls are also involved in the offside¹² activities of the various football schools. However, it has not yet been possible to include girls in the inter-cartel games, mainly due to resistance from the male players. IBISS staff have observed that it is common for male and female players to be romantically involved, and that male players often seem to want to prevent their girlfriends from meeting players from opposing cartels. Further innovations are needed to find ways around this, as are strategies for girls to be included in the inter-cartel activities. Another programme that IBISS runs specifically for girls, and with high numbers of participants, is the *Sou Menina e Mãe* (I’m a Girl and a Mother) programme, designed for mothers and pregnant girls under the age of sixteen. It includes pre- and post-natal support, education and professional development, vocational training

in tourism and hospitality, digital inclusion, language training (basic English and Spanish), art and craft, dance and music, sport, a child-care centre and psycho-pedagogical attention for children aged from three months to six years (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

Reflections

IBISS is but one of many organisations that have used sport in disadvantaged communities for social development or peace projects. Indeed, the past two decades have seen a proliferation of such projects around the world – a movement often broadly referred to as ‘sport for development and peace’, often accompanied by great enthusiasm for the power of sport to bring positive changes to some of the world’s most vulnerable populations (see Kidd, 2008). Reflecting upon IBISS’s experience with football games, several observations can be made. On the one hand, there are qualities of sport (in this case football) that make it an ideal medium for working with child soldiers, with participation in the game (and schooling) helping to provide important, often life-changing, improvements to young people’s lives. On the other hand, these social outcomes cannot be seen as the automatic or spontaneous results of sport itself (see also Schulenkorf, 2010a, 2010b; Coalter, 2010; Sugden, 2006). The positive social outcomes of the games have been realised only through very deliberate and considered efforts to develop and make use of their social potential.

Like most social practices, sport can produce all kinds of outcomes, not all of them positive. In the wrong circumstances, sport can, for example, reproduce violence, division and hostility (see Armstrong and Giulianotti, 2001; Sack and Suster, 2000). Where football’s potential lies in its immense popular appeal, it is already a part of the lives of most young Brazilians. The game therefore has a special power to draw a crowd; it brings groups of young people together into the same space. Furthermore, football games offer a physical and social outlet for young people, and a moment when ‘real life’ is suspended. As with most team sports, football can also serve as a metaphor for ethical behaviour in life (good sportsmanship and so on), and can be a good leveller – the player leaves behind socially constructed aspects of ‘self’ and is judged by how he or she plays. It provides a universal language; regardless of any socio-economic, territorial or other divisions, so long as players understand the rules of the game, they can engage with one another on a more or less ‘equal playing field’ (see Sugden, 2006). Another dimension of football in Brazil is that it is one sphere in which it is culturally

acceptable for boys to express emotion; in other spheres of life, male emotion can be treated as less acceptable. The leadership role of a socially responsible coach provides opportunity for providing young people with mentoring and support in a sport context, and this role may even extend – given the right opportunities – into a leadership role beyond the game.¹³

These are the strengths of sport that IBISS has tried to harness and make use of over the past decade in its work with child soldiers. Anecdotally, the strategies used appear to be successful: in the ten years since the *Soldados Nunca Mais* programme began, it has supported close to 3,500 children to leave the drug trade. It must be said, though, that sport is not the only medium that IBISS uses to work with child soldiers and other vulnerable groups. Indeed, many of the qualities of sport (outlined earlier) that make it a useful vehicle for working with young people are also attributable to other recreational practices with popular appeal, such as music and dance. Music, for example, also has immense popular appeal in Brazil, and provides the opportunity for suspended reality and an outlet for emotional and intellectual expression. IBISS has on many occasions run successful hip hop projects for child soldiers, providing avenues for the expression of sorrow, trauma and frustration that might not otherwise be possible in everyday settings. In IBISS's experience, what makes sport, music, dance or any other form of everyday practice valuable in relation to social development projects is the capacity of those working on the ground. What matters in achieving sustainable positive change in the lives of those IBISS works with is not so much the practice itself, but social workers who manage at minimum a combination of familiarity with local context and the dedication, imagination and innovation to adapt everyday practices to respond to the needs of their target groups. This recognition that it is the capacity of 'change agents', rather than sport itself that matters most in the development process, has also emerged from studies in entirely different social contexts. For example, Schulenkorf (2010a, 2010b) has explored sport event projects aimed at reconciliation and other social development goals involving Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in ethnically divided Sri Lanka. He found that the achievement of positive, inclusive and sustainable social outcomes relies significantly on change agents fulfilling a range of key roles and responsibilities, including being a trust builder, a networker and an agent for community empowerment.

In IBISS's case, the change agents' work often takes place behind the scenes and can easily remain unnoticed by outside observers, who might as a result attribute greater credit to football than is realistic.

Such behind the scenes work is especially important in the transition of soldiers out of the drug trade. Even if a soldier has decided to leave the drug trade, the process is rarely straightforward; he or she usually relies on a great deal of ongoing support from IBISS staff in order to achieve it. There are rules surrounding a soldier's decision to leave the drug trade: they must not have debts to the cartel; they need to talk with the drug boss about their wish to leave (which can at times be facilitated by IBISS staff); they often need to promise they will not reveal cartel secrets to anybody and that they will continue living in the favela with their family (and where the favela is taken over by another cartel, they must leave and continue to live with their original cartel). For these reasons, re-integrated ex-soldiers are often viewed with a lot of respect by favela inhabitants as 'boys and girls who made it' (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).

In relation to IBISS's sport projects, much work remains for further innovations and the evaluation of outcomes. It is not yet known, for example, how the social outcomes of the football matches between boys from enemy cartels will play out over the long term. In the short term, the social effects of the games appear to be positive and, for the moment, transformational. How this will unfold in relation to the young people's outlook and relationships over time is unknown and warrants more attention than has yet been possible given resource constraints. To what extent will previously held prejudices and hostilities return over time once these young people are absorbed back into the larger social and political structures in which their day to day lives take place? How will the young people cope if they come face-to-face in armed confrontation with the young people from opposing cartels whom they have previously befriended during football games? What are the best ways to follow-up on, and continue to develop, the work of these matches? Resource and staffing constraints also affect other practical possibilities for the programme's expansion. Given that success of the football programmes depends to a large extent on the capacities of the facilitator/coach, a major challenge for IBISS has been that of locating and recruiting people who have the right qualities and capacities to fit this role. The ideal facilitator/coach possesses a combination of knowledge and experience of social issues, social work and local context as well as sport, and the ability to relate to, identify with and connect with the young people that IBISS supports. At present, four football matches are being held per month involving groups from different favelas. While it is feasible to hold more, there are currently not enough game facilitators/coaches who are trained in IBISS's method.



Figure 11.3 Military in the favelas

Conclusion

Overall, IBISS's use of football games as part of its work with child soldiers in Rio de Janeiro has achieved a number of positive results. These results, however, need to be considered in the context of careful management and sustainable innovation on the part of the organisation's staff; football games alone would not have produced the positive results discussed. Participation in football games is certainly not enough to drastically improve a child soldier's circumstances or encourage him or her to leave the drug trade. What the games can provide, though, are opportunities for development workers to make contact with child soldiers in an informal, social and non-confrontational environment. Facilitators can make use of the football field (along with other spheres of everyday practice) as a place to begin conversations and share moments of reflection that can help young people to deal with trauma, question social hostilities and to imagine new life paths outside of the drug trade. Ongoing social and educational support, as well as cooperation with other social development agencies, seems necessary to support ex-child-soldiers on their way towards a sustained re-integration into society and more dignified and fulfilling life possibilities.

Notes

1. In the context of Rio de Janeiro, 'child soldier' refers to a minor who has been recruited to work for drug trafficking factions. Given that Rio de Janeiro

is not usually defined as being in a state of war, the term 'child soldier' has been the subject of some debate. In his report, *Children of the Drug Trade*, Dowdney provides a detailed case supporting the appropriateness of the term 'child soldier' to describe children involved in Rio's drug factions. In doing so, he compares the experiences and circumstances of these children with those of 'child soldiers' involved in traditionally defined war situations and finds many similarities (Dowdney, 2003).

2. See, for example, <http://www.ibiss-co.org.br/site/parceiros/>.
3. As some of the most studied communities in the world, it is not entirely true to say that favelas are disconnected from the broader society and outside world. Indeed, it has been noted that social scientists and non-government organisations have themselves played a strong role as intermediaries between favelas and the broader society and world. That said, some favelas have attracted far more public and scholarly attention than others (typically those of the South Zone of the city) and as a result are less 'disconnected' (McCann, 2006).
4. It is often said that only once a year during carnival are the city's favelas valued, for their contribution is fundamental to the success of the annual spectacle (Kath/van Buuren interviews, 2012–2013).
5. This status gives the organisation the right to receive government funding and certain tax reductions.
6. This is the case for boys, although not girls. While girls can and do play, they are not taken as seriously as boys in sport are, and there is little prospect of a career in football (Knijnik, 2012; Votre & Mourão, 2003). IBISS has separate training sessions and teams for girls.
7. The boy's name has been changed to maintain his anonymity.
8. The '*asfalto*' (asphalt) is a slang term used by favela residents to describe the more affluent areas of the city that have sealed roads and pavements.
9. It should be noted that not all players on the favela teams are child soldiers, but nevertheless those living in cartel zones tend to adopt prejudices against residents of the opposing cartel zones.
10. While the preconceptions and stereotypes held by the boys against their peers from opposing cartels are in one sense 'crazy' in their content and usually have little grounding in reality, it is nevertheless understandable that they emerge given the structural segregation and competition between the communities.
11. This by itself speaks of the fact that the organisation's work is just a small step in the direction of breaking down social barriers, but that much remains to be done to change the broader social structures beyond the football field.
12. For example, girls sometimes help to organise and prepare the barbeques. A result of one such barbeque in which girls from different commands were involved, the participating girls organised a time to play a volleyball game together on neutral territory.
13. Aside from working with the soccer school, most of the trainers/coaches also participate in the overall programme 'Soldiers Never More/*Soldados Nunca Mais*', including the part of the programme that focuses on developing strategies for supporting traumatised children and young people. Some coaches do street work to make contacts with soldados and try to convince them to leave the drug trade; some provide 'Success for Kids' workshops in public schools to try to change attitudes towards children from favelas (Kath/van Buuren interviews 2012–2013).

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